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ABSTRACT

The major concern of this report was to identify some of the problems which arise when educational accountability models are introduced into a state and to begin placing those problems within a communication context. It was suggested that there are problems created by the definition of the term "accountability", the term "assessment," the term "testing," and the equation frequently made between them. While large segments of the public can frequently agree on the desirability of "accountability," that agreement disappears when the specific operational definition of accountability is finally introduced. The experience of Michigan in its Michigan Educational Assessment Program was used as an extended example, although other states report problems similar to those of Michigan. Many of these problems were in the area of communication. (RC)

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COOPERATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT

Part I
Reactions to State Accountability Programs

a dissemination system
for state accountability programs

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Arthur P. Ludka, Assistant Director

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Dexter Magers, Coordinator

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ED111841

A DISSEMINATION SYSTEM FOR STATE ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAMS

PART I

REACTIONS TO STATE ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAMS

By

Erwin P. Bettinghaus
Professor of Communication
Michigan State University

Gerald R. Miller
Professor of Communication
Michigan State University

Cooperative Accountability Project
Denver, Colorado
June, 1973

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Colorado Department of Education
1362 Lincoln St., Denver, Colo. 80203

Program Administrators
Harry Phillips
Dexter Magers
U.S. Office of Education

Project Staff
Arthur R. Olson, Director
Arthur P. Ludka, Assistant Director

Michigan Coordinator
Thomas H. Fisher

Copies May be Obtained From:

COOPERATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT
Colorado Department of Education
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PREFACE

There can be no doubt that today's educators are "accountability conscious." Numerous articles and texts have appeared in recent years discussing the topic, and the agenda of most regional and national education conferences are likely to include presentations devoted to accountability. Several state legislatures have passed laws requiring accountability programs, and many states have laws requiring "assessment" programs.

These accountability programs offer a unique approach to educational planning based in part on statements of educational goals and objectives with proper attention directed toward cost benefit analyses. However, accountability programs will make positive contributions to education only if the information generated from them is understood and utilized by citizens, educators, legislators, and other audiences. Unfortunately, the practical and theoretical guidelines necessary for accountability dissemination do not seem to be available at this time.

The Michigan Department of Education, working with the Cooperative Accountability Project (an ESEA, Title V project of the Colorado Department of Education), has attempted to fill this informational void in the production of this three-part document, A Dissemination System for State Accountability Programs. This dissemination system will not present designs for report forms or informational booklets to be used by state accountability programs. It will, instead, present interpretations of the overall communication task presented by the initiation of accountability programs and the typical communication pit-falls created by the programs. An understanding of these areas will hopefully permit the reader achieve a better appreciation of the importance of quality dissemination activities and the general manner in which such activities should be designed. This report, Part I of the series, is devoted to an examination of current and past accountability models along with the reactions of various publics to these models.

Thomas H. Fisher, Coordinator
Accountability Dissemination Project
Michigan Department of Education

PART I

REACTIONS TO STATE ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAMS

INTRODUCTION

The people of the United States have always taken a direct and personal interest in the operation and achievements of the public school system in this country. The public schools had their genesis through the efforts of small groups of parents who banded together and taxed themselves in order to hire a teacher who might provide an education for their children. As the country grew in size and complexity, the ability of small groups of parents to support an adequate educational system was strained. School districts comprised of even larger groups of parents were formed and taxing powers were given to the citizens of each district. Eventually, those districts became associated with towns and cities. The model for public education, however, remained in the hands of the citizens and was not generally associated with other political entities. School boards were elected by separate vote of the people (not appointed by a mayor or a city council). In most states, the taxing power for public education still rests most directly with the individual citizens of separate school districts.

Today, the problems of public education have become extremely complex, but the interest of the citizenry of the country still remains as direct and personal as it was two hundred years ago. No longer does the local school district provide all of the money for its public schools. State governments are becoming responsible for more and more of the finances for public education. The Federal government has poured and will continue to pour billions of dollars into public education. As these larger governmental units have taken on more and more responsi-

bility for support of the public school system, they also have assumed more and more control over the system. As school systems have grown, the influence of individual parents and citizens over the education of their children has diminished.

As the personal ability of parents to control the details of their child's education has diminished, their undiminished interest in that child's education has increasingly been turned into pressure on the political bodies responsible for the funding of public education. In turn, those political bodies have responded to pressure by demanding an accounting from the educational system.

If a hypothetical look into an average parent's mind can be permitted, one might find the following argument taking place. "I can't figure out what those teachers are teaching Sally. I pay good money for their education, and no one tells me a thing. I am going to write my State Senator." When the State Senator receives the letter, he attempts to answer it. If he cannot get a clear, understandable reply from the individuals in charge of the educational system, he perhaps cannot be blamed for thinking: "What are those people doing with all the money we gave them? They can't even answer simple questions about what they are doing. We are going to have to demand an accounting from them."

Although the example is clearly hypothetical and too simple to fully account for the growth of accountability systems, it can be argued that variants of this strain of reasoning <u>are</u> responsible for the current emphasis on state and local accountability. Additional factors which have affected the growth of educational systems include (1) the continued

exposure of the public to various types of performance data, (2) the exposure of the public to some of the conditions affecting student performance, and (3) the involvement of segments of the public in helping to determine the goals of education and expected levels of performance.

The problem faced in this report, however, is basically that telling an individual or an organization to "be accountable" is not sufficient. If no mechanism exists for reporting back to the various publics that originally demanded accountability, the frustrations responsible for producing the demand for accountability will remain unsatisfied.

The three-part report develops a dissemination model outlining potential strategies for the appropriate reporting of the results obtained from the application of educational accountability models. In this paper, Part I of the report, current and past accountability models are examined along with the reactions of various publics to those models. A second paper, Part II of the report, examines current dissemination policies within the framework of contemporary communication theory to develop a rationale for the construction of an appropriate dissemination model. The final paper, Part III of the report, outlines a dissemination program and specifies its relationship to educational accountability.

SECTION I

DEFINING EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Most of the sources identified and all of the individuals contacted suggested that "Educational accountability is necessary and desirable." Agreement with that statement is easy; however, finding similar agreement with any single definition of educational accountability is not easy.

The Cooperative Accountability Project says that:

> Educational accountability serves to explain the results that are being achieved by public elementary and secondary schools. It provides a basis for developing an understanding of the relationship between quality in education and available resources in order to make educational improvements.[1]

Another attempt at giving meaning to the term "accountability" is provided by William Turnbull, President of the Educational Testing Service:

> During the past few years, there has been a rapidly growing interest in educational accountability. Although this concept appears to have somewhat different meaning for different people, most interpretations involve varying proportions of two elements--the quality of educational experience and the cost of achieving a specified level of educational excellence.[2]

The State Board of Education in Michigan takes a slightly different approach to defining educational accountability by condensing specific attempts into six categories:

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[1]Cooperative Accountability Project, Information Quarterly (Denver, Colorado: Cooperative Accountability Project, Colorado State Department of Education, August, 1972), p. 1.

[2]Educational Testing Service, State Educational Assessment Programs (Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1971), p. iii.

1. Identification, discussion and dissemination of common goals for Michigan Education.
2. Approaches to educational challenges based on performance objectives consistent with the goals.
3. Assessment of educational needs not being met and which must be met to achieve performance objectives and goals.
4. Analysis of the existing (or planned) educational delivery systems in light of what assessment tells us.
5. Evaluation and testing within the new or existing delivery system to make sure it serves the assessed needs.
6. Recommendations for improvement based on the above.[3]

Although these three definitions contain slight differences, they are representative of similar attempts to define the term "accountability." The thrust of all three definitions, and of similar definitions, is to "Tell us what is happening, how much it costs, and is it effective." Educational accountability, as it is defined in these general terms, has proven to be a very persuasive concept. Some twenty-three states have already passed "accountability" legislation, and sixteen others are currently considering such legislation.[4]

As state legislators discussed and finally passed bills setting up the accountability concept, educators reacted by attempting to develop the operational steps necessary to make accountability a reality. To further cope with the growth of the accountability concept, the Cooperative Accountability Project (CAP) was initiated in 1972. This organization seeks

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[3]Michigan Department of Education, A Position Statement on Educational Accountability (Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Department of Education, 1972), p. 2.

[4]Cooperative Accountability Project, Legislation by the States: Accountability and Assessment in Education (Denver, Colorado: Cooperative Accountability Project, revised April, 1973), p. vi.

to bind together the states of Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, and Wisconsin to "develop a comprehensive program to serve the critical accountability needs of states."[5]

The fact that almost all segments of the public agree that accountability is desirable has not eliminated criticism. The problem lies, perhaps, with the way in which "accountability" has been operationalized. It is not sufficient to be able to agree that one must account for what is being done in a school system. Some set of operational steps must be developed which, in effect, become the actual definition of "accountability." In many states, a decision was made to include assessment, i.e., the determination of student performance levels through testing, as an integral part of their accountability models. As we shall see, this decision has been responsible for much of the criticism directed at educational accountability models.

Before examining the current linkage of assessment with accountability, it will be interesting to note that, historically, public education systems have always been under various types of controls. If the term "educational accountability" had been coined a century ago, many of these controls could have been classified as accountability measures. One of the earliest steps taken was to place teacher certification under state control. Today, all states engage in some form of teacher certifi-

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[5]Donald D. Woodington, Commissioner of Education, Colorado Department of Education, "Announcement: Cooperative Accountability Project," (Unpublished document, Colorado Department of Education, Denver, Colorado, April 26, 1972), p. 1.

cation in order to insure that individuals teaching in the public school systems meet minimum standards. Almost all states gather statistics on the proportion of qualified, certified teachers operating within the various school districts of a state, and some states provide financial penalities for districts that do not meet certain standards in this field.

Another form of state control in many states is certification related to school construction. All new school construction is planned against state standards, and, when state funds are involved, school construction usually is inspected by state inspectors.

Many states have graduation requirements which are sometimes expressed in terms of the number of credits a student must take to graduate from high school, or sometimes expressed in terms of certain state standards each student must meet. Another form of state direction comes in the form of minimal standards for the number of days a school must be in session to receive state reimbursement. In Michigan, for example, a school must schedule 180 days of school a year or lose a portion of its state funds.

The Council for Basic Education has pointed to a number of other areas in which there is either direct, or indirect control of the educational system.

> The vocational, agricultural and hot lunch programs, and other programs supported with federal funds, are subject to federal regulations. Driver training programs are state regulated. Accrediting agencies dictate who shall qualify to teach and

schools of education and professional associations are influential in deciding what is to be taught.[6]

One may argue that any of these controls are either desirable or undesirable. The point here is simply that had they been introduced as "accountability" measures, the operational definition of accountability would have been associated with these measures. The desirability of educational accountability for the public would have been equated with the desirability of whatever measures were used to achieve "accountability."

This discussion is, of course, speculative. None of these measures have as yet become directly associated with educational accountability. They may be relevant to the successful operation of the public school systems in our states; they may be absolutely essential to that operation, but they are not thought of as achieving educational accountability.

"Accountability" and "assessment" have become inextricably linked in the mind of most of the general public and of many of the groups closely linked to education (e.g., legislators, school boards, teachers, etc.). A brief look at history will serve to establish the current relationship between accountability and assessment.

Turnbull suggests that the interest in educational accountability was "kindled by the launching of Sputnik in the 1950's."[7] National attention and interest were forcibly turned to the quality of the education children were getting. In the mind of many critics, the schools

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[6]Mortimer Smith, ed., Council for Basic Education Bulletin (Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education, May, 1972), p. 1.

[7]Educational Testing Service, State Educational Assessment Programs, p. iii.

must not have been doing a good job because "They let the Russians beat us." One of the first decisions made at the federal level was to pump massive amounts of money into the public school systems. Thus, the federal government provided billions of dollars to school districts during the 1960's under a number of different bills. States were encouraged to increase their support to local school districts, and most states responded. Local voters were faced with increasingly larger and larger millage votes, and they too responded during the early 1960's.

Had the United States launched the first satellite, or had the amounts of money we spent on education not been so large, it also might be possible that the concept of accountability would have died in its infancy. This is not the situation in education today. Instead of dying out, interest in the public school system remains at an all time high. The varying groups responsible for education responded to the interest in public education by advancing assessment as a prime instrument of educational accountability.

Dyer and Rosenthal suggest that three events had a considerable impact in making the equation between assessment and accountability:

> The first was the formation in 1964 of the Exploratory Committee on the Assessment of Progress in Education, which eventuated in the National Assessment program now underway. The second event was the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which included a requirement that school systems assess by objective means the effects on student achievement produced by federally funded programs for the educationally deprived. The third was the publication in 1966 of the Coleman report on Equality of Educational Opportunity, which attempted to assess, again

> in terms of measured pupil achievement, the quality of service the schools were supplying to various segments of the population.[8]

Although all three of these efforts insisted on measuring the performance of students as a criterion measure to determine the effectiveness of school systems, the Coleman report received the widest public distribution, and might well be considered the most important event in linking pupil achievement with the quality of education.

Most recently, assessment has been linked to financial accountability. The performance of students is measured and compared to the dollars that are being spent on those students. For the public, the apparent assumption is that if performance is low and expenditures are high then the school is not doing an adequate job. The assumption may well be unfortunate, but it is one of the factors with which a dissemination model must cope.

To summarize, the sequence of events that resulted in the present situation where accountability and assessment are treated by many segments of the public as synonomous terms was:

1. As a result of international events (e.g., Sputnik, the national civil rights movement, etc.) the nation focused its attention on the public school system.
2. The public found the school systems wanting in many respects.
3. Local, state, and federal governments provided billions of dollars to the school systems for their support.
4. The increase in taxes necessary to support education led to demands to account for that money.

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[8]Henry S. Dyer and Elsa Rosenthal, "Overview of the Survey Findings," State Educational Assessment Programs, p. ix.

5. The demands for accountability led to proposals (e.g., the Coleman Report) to use performance testing as the criterion for determination of educational success.
6. The demand for financial accounting then led to attempts to link performance testing to financial support of the school systems.

Assessment and testing, is highly visible to the general public. Accountability, as a concept, is complex, and less well defined in the mind of the general public. Despite the efforts of State Boards of Education, Teacher Associations, and Local School Boards to point out that assessment is not the only measure of accountability, the linkage has become firmly fixed.

SECTION II

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TESTING AND ASSESSMENT

Tests are not new to the public school systems of the nation or to education in general. It is likely that all societies, even the most primitive, devised some way to measure what the children of that society had learned. In one society, the measure of learning was the ability to kill a lion. In others, it was the ability to kill a man. In the United States, every child ever enrolled in a public school, from kindergarten through his college years, has been exposed to testing.

What is new, in education, is the way in which the public seems to view testing. In the past, the student was tested for the purpose of diagnosing and evaluating his own progress and performance. If he "failed" a test, he did not graduate, he had to make up a course, or he failed to be promoted. The test was designed to evaluate the student and was used to make judgments about the progress of the student. With the advent of assessment, the test is viewed as a way of evaluating the school system itself. If a high proportion of students "fail" a test, the public blames the teacher, the principal, the school superintendent, and the school board. Testing may not have been designed to be utilized as a method of evaluating a school system. However, the public does view testing in this fashion, and this view will have to be accounted a failure of current dissemination efforts.

Testing on a statewide basis also is not a new concept to education. The New York State Regents Examination has been in existence for a long time and helped determine whether the State of New York would

admit the student to a college or university. The State of Illinois tested all high school graduates for many years, again with the aim of providing proper college placement for the student. In 1968, the Educational Testing Service conducted a survey which established that there were some seventy-four different state testing programs operating in forty-two states. Eighteen states offered two or more different programs.[9] Most of these programs, however, were designed to help the individual teacher guide the efforts of the individual student.

Because these state testing programs were designed for individual guidance, they received little public criticism. The results were known to individual teachers and school personnel and given (when they were given at all) only in individual form to parents and students. Thus, there was less emphasis on showing that one teacher did a better job of teaching than another, no effort to show that one classroom was better than another, and no publicity showing that one community did better than another. In other words, these state testing programs were related to individual results, not comparative district or school results. As shall be established later, the problems with assessment are communication problems. There are clear differences between the way assessment is viewed by educators and by the general public. The problems with assessment began when the results of testing were: (1) published widely; (2) published in comparative form; (3) related in news stories to the performance of the school system, not the performance of the student; and (4) linked to school financing.

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[9] Ibid.

In 1968, state testing programs were not required of all school systems in a given state. Only seventeen states had provisions to use the results of state testing to help evaluate and guide instruction. Only thirteen were using tests to measure student progress in academic subjects.[10] More important to this paper, however, is the fact that in 1968 there was almost no publicity concerning the results from statewide testing. The news media did not tie testing to the success or failure of education. The state legislators did not view the results of statewide testing as a criterion against which to base state appropriations. Individual citizens did not have the opportunity to charge that "their" school was doing a poor job when compared to another school in their community or a school fifty miles down the road.

Current Assessment Efforts

Today the picture has drastically changed. State assessment is a reality in many states. Although the nature of the testing is different across the country and although the results of testing are used and disseminated differently in the various states, there is clearly an increasing emphasis on using the performance of students to evaluate the performance of the schools.

A rather complete account of current legislation relating to state assessment efforts is given in the report entitled Legislation by the States: Accountability and Assessment in Education. Excerpts from

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[10] Ibid.

that report are shown below to indicate the direction that statewide testing and assessment is taking and to show that such testing has become an important additional vehicle for achieving accountability in education.

Arizona--

Legislation passed in 1969 requires that a standardized reading achievement test be given to all third grade students. The tests are adopted by the State Board of Education and used in all public schools. The results are reported for each student, each classroom, and each school. Annual reports are submitted with recommendations to the State Legislature.

California--

All school districts in the state are required to administer specified tests and report the scores to the State Department of Education and to the local school boards. Testing is required under the California School Testing Program and the Miller-Unruh Basic Reading Act of 1965. With all tests required in California, results are reported to the State Legislature, and certain amendments in state educational programs are made as the result of the testing.

Colorado--

Colorado has passed accountability legislation which requires the evaluation of student achievement and performance. The local school districts are currently in the process of defining goals. Assessment data has been collected for the past two years. The assessment program is voluntary, with 112 of 181 districts participating in the past year's program.

Florida--

The Florida legislature passed measures in 1970 and in 1971 relating to educational accountability. Both measures were initiated by the State Department of Education. The 1971 measure directs the state commissioner of education to develop an assessment system based in part on criterion-referenced tests and in part on norm-referenced tests. Assessment has been conducted in 1972 on three levels within each district. A sample of students were tested, not all students in all districts.

Hawaii--

The Legislature passed a resolution in 1971 calling for the development of state-wide testing. Hawaii has

uced commercial tests in statewide testing for many years. The legislature resolution specified that the interpretation of test scores include the importance of the score, and that the style of report writing be clear, comprehensive, and accurate for use and distribution to the general public.

Illinois--

Illinois has had a state-wide system of testing for high school juniors for many years. In the 1972 legislature, bills were introduced and passed by the Assembly to provide for an annual assessment of pupil performance and fiscal efficiency of education. The bills have not yet been passed by the State Senate.

Maine--

The state legislature introduced a resolution in 1967 calling for an accountability program. By 1972, the State Board of Education asked the legislature for funds to begin a state-wide assessment program. Maine has collected assessment data (tied to the National Assessment of Educational Progress) once and plans to continue.

New Jersey--

The Governor of the state requested the Commissioner of Education to institute a state-wide testing program with emphasis on reading abilities for all public schools. Tests were conducted in all 4th and 12th grades in 1972. The testing program has been challenged in court by the New Jersey Education Association.[11]

Pennsylvania--

The School District Reorganization Act of 1963 called for the development of the Pennsylvania Plan for the Assessment of Educational Quality. Pennsylvania has used both national and state-developed tests, some cognitive and some affective. The program is in active operation in most districts, although it is a voluntary plan.

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[11]Dr. Gordon Ascher, Director of State Assessment, New Jersey State Department of Education, Trenton, N. J., Private communication, March 27, 1973.

Wisconsin--

> The State Legislature passed an educational assessment act in 1971, but did not fund the act until July, 1972, when $26,000 was provided for planning activities. No state-wide testing program currently exists, although the collection of assessment data is expected during the current school year.[12]

Only a sample of current legislation and activities among the various states has been discussed here. The sample suggests that state assessment is at widely different stages of development in the states. In some, testing now is being done and reports are being made as to the results of that testing. In others, testing does not yet occur, but provisions have been made for it. In still others, other measures of educational accountability are being used, and state-wide testing has not been linked to accountability models.

The State of Michigan was not mentioned in the above sample of states. It deserves special treatment since Michigan is perhaps further along than any other state in developing and using assessment as a part of an educational accountability model. Without attempting at this point to evaluate the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, nor assess the reactions to it, a brief resume of the Michigan program will be useful.

The Michigan Educational Assessment Program

The Michigan Educational Assessment Program was initiated by the State Board of Education. Legislation authorizing the program and providing funds for it was passed by the Legislature and signed into law by

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[12]Cooperative Accountability Project, Legislation By the States: Accountability and Assessment in Education, (Denver, Colorado: Cooperative Accountability Project, November, 1972), passim.

the Governor in August, 1969. This initial authorization was in the form of a paragraph in the Department of Education's 1969-70 appropriation bill. The actual "assessment bill" was not passed until 1970. Essentially, the Program called for state-wide testing in basic skills areas for all fourth and all seventh grade students enrolled in the public schools of Michigan.

The first tests were administered to students in January, 1970. The skill portions of the test were related to vocabulary, reading, mechanics of written English, and mathematics. In addition, each student completed a "Pupil Background Questionnaire." This questionnaire provided information about the student's family socioeconomic status and asked questions in three attitude areas: attitude toward schools, toward school achievement, and toward self.

In June, 1970, analysis of the results was completed and a report summarizing the results by region and community type was prepared and released to the public. Each local district also received a summary of its own results.

In January, 1971, tests were administered for the second time. This second test version though lengthened to permit reliable scores to be reported for individual pupils, utilized materials in the same skill areas as the first version. The attitude items were revised slightly, and the socio-economic items were revised extensively in an effort to respond to criticism of the instrument that had been found offensive by certain parents and administrators. In May, 1971, the local district and school results were released to local educators. A public report of the same local district results was prepared and released on February 14, 1972. In the public report, each school district was reported on a

percentile basis thereby tending to encourage comparisons of districts' relative rankings by the news media.

In January, 1972, tests were administered for the third time. No attitude items were included and no socio-economic items were included.

In November, 1972, local district results were again published and released to the public. Again, each school district's score was presented in percentile form.

At the present time (April, 1973), Michigan has completed the fourth (and last) administration of the statewide normative tests. The Department of Education is preparing to introduce objective referenced tests to replace the normative tests in the school year 1973-74.

Several additional comments need to be added to this brief resume of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. First, although the first tests (1970) were not considered individually reliable, the 1971 and subsequent tests were individually reliable and met the usual standards for standardized tests and manuals. This point is important in the light of certain criticisms raised about the tests, which will be considered in Section III of the Report.

Second, there was considerable criticism of the program from its beginning. We shall detail the criticism later, but it should be noted here that criticism was present from school administrators and other public segments from the beginning of the program.

Third, after the first year of the program, assessment was tied to a compensatory education funding program. Section 3 of the State School Aid Bill of 1970 provided additional funds to schools that measured

very low on the achievement tests. Although public hearings were held on the Section 3 legislation and all school districts were notified, the linkage of funding to assessment received very little mention in the news media.

Finally, it should be noted that assessment is only a portion of the total accountability program in Michigan. The third report of the 1971-72 Michigan Educational Assessment Program listed some twenty-two, state-wide measures associated with educational accountability in Michigan.[13] These measures included measures in the categories of human resources, district financial resources, student background, dropout rate, and district size measures, in addition to the achievement measures. These additional measures received very little publicity, and the total impact of the program, so far as the general public and the press was concerned, came through the academic assessment portion of the program. While the test results were reported by the State Board of Education in standard score units and district percentile rankings, the latter received the more-widespread publicity. In contrast to most "education news" which is buried on the back pages of newspapers, the results of state-wide testing in Michigan appeared in front page stories in many newspapers in the state and was the subject of numerous radio and television news programs.

The Michigan situation illustrates the point made earlier in this paper. It is certainly the case that educators and legislators do

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[13]Michigan Department of Education, Local District and School Report: Explanatory Materials (Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Department of Education, June, 1971), p. 9.

not think of "accountability" as being the same thing as "assessment." But, when a strong assessment program is introduced as part of an overall accountability program, assessment is likely to come to mean accountability as far as the general public is concerned.

SECTION III

ACCOUNTABILITY, ASSESSMENT AND COMMUNICATION

In this section of the paper, reactions of various groups to accountability measures will be reviewed. Although some of the examples used come from general accountability measures developed and used in various states around the country, primary emphasis will be on the reactions of specific groups to assessment in Michigan.

A brief orientation to the communication process as it relates to educational accountability models will set the scene for a detailed examination of the effects of introducing accountability models. Educational "accountability" was demanded by the public as a result of dissatisfaction with their perceptions of the way in which public education was being conducted, with perceptions of unequal opportunity, and with the sharp rise in taxes during the 1960's. In essence, the public was saying, "Communicate with us. Tell us what you are doing and why it costs what it does."

The public put pressures on state legislatures--pressures which were felt by state education agencies, as well as local school officials. The reaction was to agree to institute accountability models through various forms of legislation. However, in instituting various types of accountability and assessment, local and state officials generally have not come to grips with the question of how to report back to that public whose requests were largely responsible for the initial decision to institute the program.

Dissemination Patterns

Two patterns generally have been followed in developing dissemination models to accompany accountability or assessment models: (1) the results are disseminated only to state and local officials or to state legislatures, or (2) the results in somewhat simplified form are released to the general public through the news media. A look at some of the individual states will illustrate these two forms of dissemination.

Arizona. Arizona supplies one of the clearest examples of a state where the law as passed provides for very limited accountability. The Senate Bill (S.15-1134) states,

> The results of any uniform tests administered to pupils under this article shall be reported to the State Board of Education. The results shall include the score of each individual pupil, the score of each classroom, the score of each school and such other information or comparative data as the State Board of Education may by regulation require. A copy of such results shall be retained in the office of the state superintendent. ...An annual report shall be submitted to the State Board of Education, to the legislature, each district board of education in the state and all superintendents.[14]

California. The California School Testing Act of 1969 stated as one of its objectives "...evaluating the effectiveness of the public schools as shown by the competence and progress of public school pupils in basic skills and content courses." The objective of the dissemination approach to this goal was "To make such evaluations available to educational agencies and the public as a basis for the correction of deficiencies..."

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[14]Cooperative Accountability Project, Legislation by the States, November, 1972, p. 1.

However, in accomplishing this objective, the bill goes on to state, "The Department of Education shall prepare and submit an annual report to the Legislature, the State Board of Education and to each school district in the state...of the results and test scores of the testing program in basic skills courses...."[15]

Colorado. Colorado is in the process of implementing its accountability model. The legislation does specify objectives and the means for accomplishing the objectives. The Educational Accountability Act of 1971 states that the legislature desires the exploration of ways of: "Reporting to students, parents, boards of education, educators, and the general public on the educational performance of the public schools and providing data for an appraisal of such performance...." In the Section of the Act requiring reports, it states:

> Not later than March 1, 1972, and each year thereafter, the State Board of Education shall transmit to the general assembly a report of its activities in developing and administering the educational accountability program, including the progress of the state and local school districts toward the achievement of their respective goals and objectives."[16]

To date, the Colorado program has been voluntary in nature. Not all students have been tested. One hundred and twelve of the one hundred eighty-one districts participated in the testing program. The state board produced an assessment of learner needs in the form of a report that was fed back to the local districts and reported to the legislature. The development of educational goals and objectives is being handled at

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[15] Ibid, pp. 2-3.

[16] Ibid, pp. 5-7.

the local district level on a voluntary basis, and excellent cooperation has been secured.[17]

In these three examples, the emphasis is on making reports to state boards of education, state legislatures, or local officials. Note that the legislation in these states does not forbid public disclosure of the results of assessment or the use of an accountability model, but neither does it either require that the general public be informed or encourage such disclosure. There is no question but that some of the reports that are made to various official bodies may reach the news media, and, if they do, they will also reach the public. Dissemination activities may have been planned to include official agencies only, but release of any information to any source can be expected to be eventually received by the public in some form.

There are some states where either by design, or by practice, reporting of the results of testing or of the application of other accountability measures does reach the public.

Florida. In Florida, the Commissioner of Education is charged with developing a state-wide system of assessment based in part on "criterion-referenced tests and in part on norm-referenced tests." The Commissioner is then charged to:

> ...make an annual public report of the aforementioned assessment results. Such report shall include, but not be limited to, a report of the assessment results for each school dis-

[17] Dr. John Erion, Accountability Consultant, Colorado State Department of Education, Denver, Colorado, Private communication, March 27, 1973.

> trict, and the state, with an analysis and recommendation concerning the costs and differential effectiveness of instructional programs.[18]

The report prepared by the Commissioner was distributed to each local district, and each district was responsible for communication with the public and the news media. The report was also given to the capital press corps at the state level.[19]

Hawaii. Hawaii does not require state-wide testing, but does encourage it. Commercial tests have been used on a state-wide basis for a number of years, and more formal assessment is being considered. It is interesting to note that Hawaii recognized one of the major problems in disseminating complex reports to the general public when it urged consideration with respect to: "Style of report writing that is clear, comprehensive, and accurate for use and distribution to the general public."[20]

Michigan. The status of assessment testing in Michigan has already been mentioned. There was no legislative mandate requiring release to the general public of the district by district results from the first year of the program. In subsequent years, both legislative mandate and State Board of Education Policy called for public release.

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[18]Cooperative Accountability Project, Legislation by the States, November, 1972, pp. 10-11.

[19]Dr. James Impara, Director of Assessment, Florida State Department of Education, Tallahassee, Florida, Private communication, March 27, 1973.

[20]Cooperative Accountability Project, Legislation by the States November, 1972, pp. 12-13.

The results of the first year's results were distributed to local districts, and public pressure was, in part, responsible for release at local and state levels of the results from subsequent years.

These examples illustrate both patterns of dissemination (i.e., dissemination to official agencies or direct dissemination to the general public). Obviously, in some situations, both methods are used and results are announced publicly at the same time they are released to official agencies.

It can be argued that it makes very little "practical" difference which pattern is used. If results are released to state legislators only, or to state and local officials, there will inevitably be "leaks" of the material to the news media, and subsequent publication and interpretation of the results. If results are made available to the general public as well as official agencies, the news media will publish those results along with "background" comments obtained from local or state officials. The result is likely to be that it becomes impossible to separate "official" releases from "unofficial" releases.

The problem stems from at least two sources: (1) a failure to understand the nature of the communication process, and (2) a failure to understand the term "general public." To explore both of these sources, the experiences of Michigan during the last three years will be useful.

The Communication Process

In its simplest form, communication is a process through which a Source conceives and transmits a Message through some Channel to one or

a group of Receivers.[21] Sources may be either individuals or institutions such as state boards of education, state legislatures, newspapers, local school boards, etc. A group of individuals who have identity as either a legal body or a socially identified group will be treated in the mind of receivers as a single individual. For example, it is doubtful that very many members of the "general public" could identify any individuals within the Michigan State Department of Education. But, many members of the public might be able to say that an article or report had "come from the education people in Lansing." In spite of the fact that reports are prepared by individuals and issued by individuals, receivers tend to treat sources in terms of their official identities and not their individual identities.

Messages are the physical manifestations of ideas and concepts. They may appear as stories in a newspaper, oral reports passed to an audience, a radio bulletin or a television documentary, or a formal report detailing the results of a study. A distinction can be made between the message as it is conceived and viewed by the source and the same message as it is viewed and interpreted by a receiver. There may be a high degree of correspondence between the message as conceived by a source and received by a receiver, or there may be little correspondence.

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[21]For an extended discussion of various communication models the reader may refer to The Process of Communication by David K. Berlo (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1960) or Persuasive Communication by Erwin P. Bettinghaus (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968).

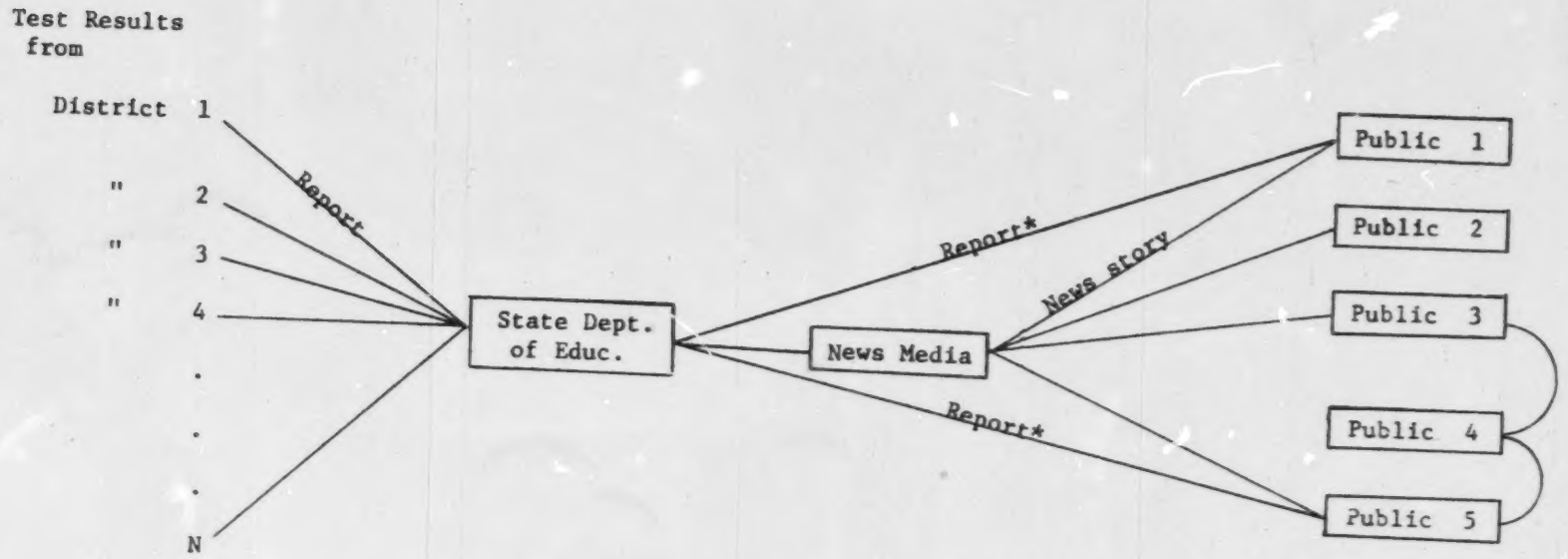
Channels refer to those ways in which messages are typically transmitted to a receiver. These may include the newspaper, radio and television station, individuals who serve to act as a transmitter of the message, or the type of situation in which the message is transmitted (e.g., a group situation or an individual reception).

Receivers are simply those individuals who are exposed to and attend to any given message. For purposes of this analysis, receivers can be divided along several different dimensions. One may refer to "intended" and "non-intended" receivers, i.e., between those individuals for whom a message was specifically designed and transmitted and those individuals who were exposed and attended to the message even though it was not intended that they receive it. A distinction should also be made between an "informed" receiver and one who is "uninformed." An "informed" receiver is one who has received background information before receiving a particular message versus an "uninformed" receiver who has been exposed to the message without being aware of the background that produced the message. Other characteristics of receivers important to the development of a dissemination model are discussed in Part III of this report, but the two distinctions raised now will help in identifying some of the problems which arose in Michigan over the attempt to disseminate information about state assessment testing.

FIGURE 1 illustrates how the communication process can become complicated when various organizations and various receivers are involved in the situation. In Michigan, the steps involved in disseminating information about assessment testing can be simplified for the purposes of this discussion:

FIGURE 1

A SCHEMATIC VIEW OF THE DISSEMINATION OF THE RESULTS
OF ASSESSMENT TESTING IN MICHIGAN



*Local District Results

1. The State Department of Education tested all 4th and 7th grade students within the state, and prepared a series of reports covering various aspects of that testing.

2. The State Department of Education prepared various news releases which were received by the news media of the state. These releases were published with varying degrees of fidelity within the news media of the state. In addition, the news media received the actual reports covering the testing program, and varying stories were prepared and appeared in the news media which reflected a "reporter's view" of the reports.

3. An eventual body of receivers (the "general public") received information about assessment testing from several possible sources:

    a. The original report.
    b. Directly from news media reports.
    c. From a source who had been exposed to either (1) or (2).
    d. From some combination of (1), (2), or (3).

4. The eventual body of receivers interpreted the messages they received in ways which were dependent on:

    a. The actual source or sources from which they received their information.
    b. The degree of relationship they held to the public school system.
    c. The level of information they held prior to receiving a message about assessment testing.
    d. The attitudes they held about the school system, about education in general, or about any variable which might enter into their judgement of a news story.

Reactions of the General Public

Even though one often hears references made to "the general public," there is no such entity. The term seems to convey a vision of

a large, amorphous mass of undistinguishable individuals who receive a message and react to it with a single, collective response. This is, of course, a naive view of reality. A more precise view is that the "general public" is composed of various publics or groups of individuals, each group distinguishable by characteristics which make it probable that they will react to a message in different ways.

This view can be illustrated by looking at the reactions from some of the groups who received and responded to messages about assessment testing in Michigan. These groups include: (1) education professionals and professional organizations, (2) governmental agencies, both state and local, (3) the news media, (4) quasi-governmental or professional organizations (e.g., the PTA and the Chamber of Commerce), and (5) groups of parents and taxpayers.

Reactions from Professionals and Professional Organizations

The term "professional" refers to teachers, principals, superintendents, testing specialists, psychologists, educational specialists in institutions of higher education, and similar groups of individuals having a direct relationship to the public school system. Several characteristics governed the reactions of professionals to assessment testing in Michigan:

1. There are few attacks on the concept of assessment per se. That is, few professionals stated flatly that Michigan should not engage in testing or other accountability efforts. In fact, most of their statements were of the nature, "I believe in educational accountability, but..."

2. Most of the comments from professionals were guardedly negative. The closer an individual was to occupying a political role, the more guarded his response. The most severe attacks on the testing came from a committee chaired by a professor of administration and higher education. School superintendents, on the other hand, were likely to respond by saying, "I am in favor of assessment, but I also agree with many of the criticisms I have heard."

3. In spite of the fact that neither the State Legislature nor the State Department of Education ever made statements suggesting that the Assessment Program was to be considered the total accountability program for Michigan, an almost unvarying theme running through the responses of professionals is the statement, "Testing is only a part of accountability. You are unfair in showing only a part of the picture."

With these characteristics in mind, consider a sample of some of the reactions of professionals and organizations of professionals.

Teachers. There are relatively few letters or comments from individual teachers in Michigan. In fact, a search of records of the Research, Evaluation and Assessment Services files revealed only ten letters which could be clearly identified as having been written by an individual classroom teacher within the K-12 system in Michigan. There were letters from individual teachers who were representing a local teachers group, but few letters from individuals. Most of the letters that did come into the offices of the Michigan Department of Education from individual teachers were critical only of the socio-economic questions on the first two assessment tests. Examples of some of the comments will be useful to illustrate the position taken by those few individual

teachers who did communicate their concerns in writing:

> As a fourth grade teacher, and mother of two children, I'd like to protest the use of the Michigan Assessment Test in our public schools.. I was reluctant to administer the test from the time I had received it and rightfully so. The personal nature of the questions were most difficult for 9-year old children to comprehend and answer truthfully as they knew they should....I don't feel these children should have to cope with these very personal questions. I feel the remainder of the test (the skills test) is perfectly valid, but I would ask that the first part be eliminated from the Michigan Assessment Test.
>
> We are extremely appalled and shocked with the report that the...Consolidated School Board gave to the public in a five page report before the public...ridiculing our fine staff of teachers and belittling one of the most conscientious faculties in Michigan for their poor showing on the Michigan Assessment Tests....Not only did they do this but we were subject to further harrassment by seeing the shorter item published in the ...Press. Was it the purpose of the test to bring humiliation and irreparable damage to the staff...? Before the tests were administered, articles in the paper stated that the teachers would not be ridiculed or blamed for low scores. What happened that our board was given the authority to degrade our staff?
>
> ...I wonder how you can justify spending forty thousand dollars to obtain information that you could have obtained from any teacher in the state. We all know that children who come from middle class backgrounds score higher on achievement tests than children from lower class backgrounds....I feel the same way about the trend toward teacher accountability. I have two degrees from the finest universities in the world, and enough experience to know that I pour my heart and soul, my experience and a large portion of my salary into my work with children and I still cannot make up the deficit my children bring to school....I'm to be held accountable because a child who lives with his parents and baby sister in the top floor of an old barn without heat or water can not compete with a child who lives in a four bedroom, two and a half bath home on a mini-estate? The people who should be held accountable are the ones who have insured that for the last two years my school district has not been able to buy books or pencils or crayons or films or toys

> or games or anything that might give the children a chance. That's like putting a surgeon in a mud puddle and telling him to perform a heart transplant.

Three different viewpoints have been deliberately selected from the responses in letters from individual teachers in Michigan. The first letter is most representative of the few letters that were written. The second letter is an expression of shock at finding that some teachers might be blamed for low scores, and the third letter attempts to place the blame on conditions outside of her jurisdiction within the school district in which she works, i.e. to suggest that other groups are accountable.

Education Associations. Teachers, of course, are both individuals, and members of educational associations, associated either locally, with a state association, or both. One might argue that one of the reasons for few letters from individual teachers is that teachers expected their educational associations to make their viewpoints known. In Michigan, the educational associations did respond, both at the state and the local level. In general, such groups opposed the use of the Michigan Assessment Tests. For example, the Michigan Education Association passed the following resolution at its annual meeting in 1972:

> The Michigan Education Association views with growing concern the misuse of standardized achievement tests in the state of Michigan. After three years of using these tests in the state assessment program, no significant contribution to knowledge has been made as a result of that program. The current Michigan assessment program is expensive, unproductive, and tends to mislead the public. The difference between the educated and the uneducated person is not primarily a matter of test scores. Repeated findings show that the correlation between years of school completed and

> later success is much higher than the correlation between test scores and later success. It is unwise, therefore, to attempt to evaluate a school's performance by the exclusive use of standardized cognitive tests limited to measuring vocabulary, reading comprehension, and arithmetic skills.
>
> Therefore, be it resolved that the Michigan Education Association oppose vigorously the use of standardized achievement testing for purposes which do not benefit the child and may be harmful to his welfare.[22]

The Michigan Education Association has smaller affiliate associations in many cities and school districts. The conclusions of one of the smaller district associations are similar to those of the larger, parent body:

> We believe the substantial problems in the assessment program, many of which are outlined in the attached paper, are not likely to be remedied in the near future. Our concern is heightened by the general lack of respect which both professional staff and students have for it, and by at least some parental complaint about certain questions asked. For years, the district has administered national standardized tests which have been validated and are generally accepted. The current State assessment program does not have the benefit of that long experience in developing its norms and instruments.[23]

Although this paper will not attempt to evaluate the nature of the stand taken by any group, it is interesting to note that no criticisms of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program were found which state that "teachers are professionals and thus should not be held accountable for their performance." Neither is there any suggestion from the professional associatons that teachers should not be judged by the perfor-

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[22]Action taken by the Representative Assembly of the Michigan Education Association, April 20-21, 1972.

[23]Livonia Education Association, Livonia, Michigan. An unpublished memorandum to the membership, October 26, 1971.

mance of their students, an argument frequently alleged to be the reason why accountability measures are opposed by teachers. All of the data located suggest that educational associations, the professional associations for teachers, objected to the assessment testing on grounds that the tests were unfair, that they were poorly conceived, that parents and students objected to them, that they should not be used to make financial judgments, or that they were poor measures of accountability. None of the statements argued that teachers should not be judged in some way by the performance of their students.

School Administrators. This classification includes primarily school principals, school district superintendents, and other purely administrative personnel. Such individuals are, of course, responsible to their school boards as well as to the staff who work in the schools themselves. Their concerns are reflected in questions about the quality of the tests themselves, the use to which the test results might be put, the possible relationship between test results and state funding, and the potential damage that might be done to a district by public release of the test results. These concerns are illustrated in a resolution signed by a number of the state's school superintendents:

> Respectfully, then, we request the State Board of Education to take the following action concerning state wide assessment:
>
> 1. That results of the 1971 State Assessment tests will not be used to judge the quality of individual school district programs.
>
> 2. That results of the 1971 State Assessment tests will not be used to influence curriculum changes in individual school districts.

3. That results of the 1971 State Assessment tests will not be used for any allocation of funds other than currently required by State Law.

4. That results of the 1971 State Assessment tests for specific local school districts will be released only to local school officials as was done in 1970.

5. That a broad based advisory committee be established immediately to study and recommend changes in the current State Assessment Program and these recommended changes be incorporated by September of 1971 into a revisal of Assessment Report #7.[24]

A specific comment from one superintendent points to the confusion that might result in the minds of citizens:

> It makes little difference how good or how poor the State's Educational System is, the result of releasing the scores is to indicate to the residents of a school district whether their children are achieving above, at, or below the State average, academically. Statistically, forty-five percent of the schools will be placed above the median, forty-five percent below the median and ten percent will comprise the median....If the State of Michigan has an educational system that is outstanding and excellent education is provided for all, a wrong situation could develop. Those persons residing in forty-five percent (those below the median) of the districts would be told that their schools are not doing the "job." Conversely, if the State's Educational System is not sound and all Districts are doing a poor "job," those persons residing in forty-five percent (those above the median) of the school districts will be told their schools are doing an excellent "job." Both assumptions would, of course, be untrue.[25]

In a number of school districts in Michigan, superintendents, with the

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[24]Action taken by representatives of forty-one Michigan School Districts, February 8, 1971.

[25]Letter from one Michigan school district superintendent, February 17, 1971.

approval of their boards of education, threatened to withhold the test results unless some of the questions they had about the tests could be answered.[26] Eventually, all districts did report scores to the State Board of Education, but only after much correspondence had passed between the superintendents and officials of the State Department of Education. Many of the questions raised in this correspondence were concerned with the eventual use that would be made of the data and with the "image" that "poor" results might impose on the district and thus on the administrative staff. These concerns are essentially communication concerns that might have been solved with better pre-planning for dissemination of the results.

University Professors. Almost every state has a College of Education within its boundaries. The individuals who serve as professors of education feel directly responsible for at least some of the success of any educational program carried out within the boundaries of the state. In Michigan, the assessment program came under severe attack from a group associated with Michigan Colleges and Universities. An analysis of the Michigan Assessment Program is seen in a series of papers produced by "The Task Force on Educational Assessment and Accountability of the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration."[27] The Task Force was chaired by Herbert C. Rudman, Professor of Administration and

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[26] See footnote 24.

[27] A complete list of all papers produced by the task force is given in Appendix A.

Higher Education at Michigan State University. It began its work in 1970, and released a final report in April, 1972. Thus, its work covered essentially the first two years of the assessment program.

The response of the Task Force to the Michigan Assessment Program was on three levels: (1) a concern with the specific instruments being used in the program, (2) a concern with the relationship between assessment and accountability, and (3) a concern with the procedures used to introduce the assessment program in Michigan.

It is not the aim of this report to discuss the validity of the technical criticisms raised by the Task Force. Replies to these technical criticisms were made by other technical specialists.[28] Although some of the technical questions raised on both sides may be related to poor communication, more important for this paper are those recommendations of the Task Force that seem more generally related to the development of a dissemination model.

The Task Force produced twelve recommendations to improve, in their view, the Michigan Assessment Program. Their comments fall in three major areas: (1) criticisms relating to the release of information to various publics, (2) criticisms concerning the relationship between assessment and accountability, and (3) criticisms relating to the manner in which the program was introduced.

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[28]Reference may be made to: Donlon, Thomas F. "Reaction to MAPEA Document: A Technical Analysis of The Michigan Assessment of Basic Skills." An unpublished memorandum of Educational Testing Service, June 12, 1972; Michigan Department of Education. "Staff Reply to the MAPEA Task Force Papers." An unpublished report prepared by the staff of the Michigan Department of Education, June 19, 1972 and Weisbrodt, Jerome "Review of Professor Rudman's Report." An unpublished memorandum of Educational Testing Service, June 15, 1972.

Those recommendations related to the way in which information is released to the public included:

> Recommendation #5. If the State of Michigan finds it useful to rank its school systems on a percentile rank basis, then the district's rank should be given in terms of range rather than a single point.
>
> Recommendation #6. Data reported back to the state should clearly indicate the following input data about the school district: (1) a measure of scholastic aptitude as measured by a reputable standardized test, (2) socioeconomic data such as (a) occupation of parents, (b) years of schooling of adults in the community age 25 and over, and (c) median family income. These input factors are the only ones which seem to show a moderately high (.50+) to high (.90+) positive relationship to the output data as indicated by achievement test results.
>
> Recommendation #7. The state should identify those input data which have a low positive or negative relationship to output data (+.20)....It is to be hoped that once these low-relationship variables have been identified, new legislation will be drawn which will correct the erroneous assumption that cost factors as an input are related to academic performance as an output of the schools.[29]

Those recommendations of the Task Force which are related to their perceptions of the appropriate relationship between assessment and accountability were:

> Recommendation #1. Those in charge of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program must reexamine the fundamental assumptions which seem to be implicit in their approach to assessment. Of particular importance are the assumptions dealing with:
>
> a. the uniqueness of a Michigan curriculum.
> b. the appropriate sources for performance objectives and goals of the curriculum.
> c. the relationship between educational expenditures and scholastic output.

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[29]Herbert C. Rudman, et al., The Michigan Educational Assessment Program: An Abstract (unpublished document approved by the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration, April 25, 1972), pp. 11-12.

> Recommendation #3. If the State wants a unified state curriculum, then it must develop its goals and performance objectives based in part upon modern instructional materials...
>
> Recommendation #4. Rather than spend over $1,000,000 to produce a patchwork test, the state should seek to use a nationally produced, carefully constructed standardized achievement test which can provide national, state, local district and local building norms upon which state and local decisions can be reached...
>
> Recommendation #8. Ability norms should be established which could serve as reasonable indicators to establish the effectiveness of school learning within, and between districts in the state...
>
> Recommendation #10. The state department should concentrate its efforts on the substantive content--both cognitive and affective--which the schools will teach and the children will learn. It should de-emphasize the "gimmicky" dimensions of step 4 in its assessment model, i.e., year-around schooling, performance contracting, experimental and demonstration schools, alternative occupational schooling and the like...
>
> Recommendation #12. While appropriate assessment techniques are necessary to the development of an accountability system for the State of Michigan, it should be recognized that it is only a portion of an accountability model and a good assessment program should not deter the development of a total accountability system for the evaluation and improvement of public education in the State of Michigan.[30]

There is one recommendation in the report of the Task Force which points rather sharply, to a criticism of the program based on the pre-planning activities of the State Department of Education:

> Recommendation #11. The State Board of Education, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the State Department of Education should involve teachers and administrators in a meaningful way in the planning and implementation of the accountability program. These agencies must seek out those whose views run counter to their prevailing departmental views so that the account-

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[30] Ibid, pp. 10-14

> ability program can have a wide base of genuine support. Seeking out only those whose views support the State Board of Education, and its professional staff has resulted and will continue to result in wide-spread resistance to what could be an important part of educational decision-making.[31]

Each of the recommendations reported here can be viewed as related to a communication problem between the State Department of Education and the Task Force. Those recommendations (5, 6, and 7) relating to the release of data to the public through the news media are ones which ask for a different method of expressing the data, more clarity in reporting, or more complete reporting of the data. The second set of recommendations (1, 3, 4, 8, 10, and 12) are concerned with what the task force felt was a failure on the part of the State Department of Education to carefully consider all the available alternatives, i.e., with a failure to discuss the questions completely. The State Department would undoubtedly reply to these recommendations that they had given careful consideration to the points raised. It is not a matter of concern here whether, in fact, these and similar questions had been discussed carefully. Rather, the point is that there were strong feelings on the part of Task Force members that the Department of Education had not carefully considered all of the alternatives.

The final recommendation (No. 11) is perhaps the most interesting. The recommendation makes it clear that this group felt strongly that some of its members, or other similar professionals within higher education in the state, should have been consulted in the early planning

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[31] Ibid, p. 14.

stages of the program and not after the program was under way. Again, the concern is not with the question of whether this particular group should have had an influence on the assessment program, but with the dissemination questions raised by Recommendation 11. (This recommendation, with its implications for developing a dissemination model, will be discussed more fully in Part II of this document.)

Although the Task Force members produced the most detailed criticisms of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, they were by no means the only specialists to respond to the program. Two such criticisms are shown below:

> ...attitudinal portions of the tests must be grossly unreliable and of questionable validity due to their brevity if nothing else. To measure such subtle characteristics as attitude requires nothing more than a dozen ideas. What qualifications does E.T.S. (The Educational Testing Service) bring to this task?
>
> I am sure I need not tell you of the misuses and abuses of the 1971 Michigan assessment results which have emerged from official release of the data through the media. ...The most fundamental criticisms professional educators leveled at the assessment program at its inception remain largely unanswered.[32]

There were a number of other responses from the professional members of various school systems. Most of the criticisms were directed at technical problems seen within the testing procedures or at the way in which the media treated the test results. The latter subject will be treated at greater length in succeeding papers.

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[32]Letters from a school psychologist and a guidance counselor, respectively, no date.

Reactions from Governmental Agencies, State and Local

Within this category are included local Boards of Education and State Legislators as the primary groups concerned with the Michigan Assessment Program. A distinction has been made between Board of Education members as elected officials and the previous category of school administrators. It should be noted, however, that some of the materials were prepared for particular Boards of Education by the Superintendents of those districts. State Legislators obviously received many letters and comments from their constituents regarding the newspaper reports that appeared when the reports were made public. Their responses, however, were to make inquiries of the State Department for ways in which the letters might be answered.

In general, Boards of Education were concerned about the way in which their specific district might show up in the results of the assessment testing program. They were also concerned about the way in which the results of the tests had been released to the press. Some comments from several Boards are appropriate:

1. The...Board of Education has discussed the recent assessment tests administered to 4th and 7th graders. It is a position of the Board that it supports the position of some schools relative to objections to the assessment tests relative to content, evaluation and intent of use for funding.[33]

2. ...our concern is not to be construed as a resistance to accountability. On the contrary, it is a policy of this school district that any new program design contain a built-in evaluation plan. The Michigan

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[33]Resolution passed by the board of education of a small-sized Michigan school district, no date.

> Assessment Program, while billed as providing the citizens of Michigan with information about the progress of education does not, in fact, provide true accountability. ...The Board resolution to approve the...data for transmission to Lansing included one provision in addition to this letter: that a delegation of Board members and school staff be appointed to seek a meeting with the State Board of Education in order to present our concerns in greater detail and to respond to questions from members of the State Board.[34]

3. Statement in the form of a resolution. Whereas, the pupil background and attitude questions on the socio-economic section of the state assessment tests are unnecessary, unwarranted, costly and an invasion of privacy, which interferes with the individual's basic freedoms and...Whereas, the academic portion of the test is narrow in scope and of questionable value in terms of measurement which leaves suspicions as to its validity,...Therefore, be it resolved that the ...Board of Education will cooperate by returning the 1971 test answer sheets but at this time serves notice that unless the State Board of Education shows a willingness to listen to authorities in the field of measurement and parents to provide for standardized tests that will remove the aura of suspicion and concern now voiced by educators and citizens over the entire state regarding the current testing program, that the...will not cooperate in the state assessment for the year 1971-72.[35]

Evident in these and other statements from school board members is the concern they had about: (1) the way in which the results from their district would be reported; (2) the socio-economic portions of the testing program; and (3) the lack of communication prior to institution of the testing program with the State Board of Education.

The State Legislature in Michigan originally instituted the

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[34]Resolution passed by the board of education of a large-sized Michigan school district, no date.

[35]Resolution passed by the board of education of a middle-sized Michigan school district, no date.

Michigan Educational Assessment Program in legislation described earlier in this paper. After the assessment program was under way, however, some legislators apparently had second thoughts as a result of the letters and comments they received. Before reporting on some of the major concerns of legislators, however, it should be noted that the record shows relatively few comments from individual legislators. Access was not obtained to the individual letters that state legislators might have sent to their constituents, but the absence of public statements from the majority of legislators indicates a willingness to stand behind the legislation they originally passed.

Perhaps the strongest statement about the Michigan Educational Assessment Program from any members of the state legislature came from five State Senators who objected strongly to one of the individual passages on the reading portion of the test which they felt was "anti-free enterprise and anti-industrial." In news releases which appeared in a number of news media sources around the state, the five Senators called for a moratorium on testing until the objectional passages could be eliminated from the test. Their call for a Senate Resolution objecting to the passage did not receive support from the remainder of the Senate.

In discussions with several legislators or with their staff members, the point was made that while there was considerable public interest generated by the public release of the test results during the second year of testing, the general furor over state assessment testing had died down and state legislators were receiving very few letters on the subject from constituents. This comment is consistent with reports

from the State Department of Education who also report that the flurry of letters regarding state assessment had diminished over the three-year period.

Reactions from the News Media

The success of any program which might be controversial in nature will depend in part on the reaction and reporting given the program by the various news media within the concerned area. Before reporting on some of the news stories which appeared relative to the assessment program, it should be suggested that most of the stories which appeared were stories written about the particular set of scores appropriate to the individual district that was covered by a particular newspaper, radio, or television station. In general, these stories were relatively brief and simply reported the district's rank, usually providing a comparison with other districts that might be comparable to the district in which that news source was particularly interested or within the circulation area of the paper. It is important to note that although the figures for individual districts relative to the results of the assessment tests themselves were available, along with a number of other accountability measures, most news stories focused only on the results of the assessment tests. Few stories made any attempt to go beyond the simple district rankings of assessment test results. This fact is significant and will be dealt with in following papers.

Two additional types of news media messages deserve attention. The State Department of Education, like other governmental sources, issued periodic news releases relative to the development of the assess-

ment program. Most of the news stories examined were either stories using the news release almost verbatim or ones which simply rewrote and shortened the "official" news release issued by the State Department of Education. Relatively few stories attempted to "go beyond" the official new release to report comments of other officials, either state or local. In fairness to the news media, it should be stated that many individual newspapers do not maintain a Lansing office and thus would not have reporters on the scene. But, even in the largest news areas examination revealed only a few news stories which added substantively to the official release.

The final issue relative to the reactions from the news media is related to editorial comments. Research revealed approximately thirty newspaper editorials about the Michigan Educational Assessment Program spread over a three-year period. Access to accounts of television or radio editorials was not available, however.

The editorials appearing in the first few months after announcement of the program were generally favorable to the program and its goals. An excerpt from one editorial will illustrate the type of comment being made:

> A pioneer effort in testing Michigan students as to basic skills will be made during the last two weeks of this month. The results will be viewed with more than passing interest since they bear importantly on the assumption that equal educational opportunity does not presently exist throughout the state's elementary and secondary schools.

> If the assumption is true, the tests should show wide discrepancies between areas and schools. If not, then some new thinking will be in order, but it is almost certain that the discrepancies will be evident...
>
> The State Board of Education is to be congratulated in taking this first step, for the information gained will be valuable in determining problem areas and charting a future course.[36]

After the first years experience with the assessment program, the nature of many editorials changed. There were more questions raised about the program and more "negative" editorials. In particular, editorial writers were quick to pick up the legislative comments about the reading portions of the tests and comments about the attitude and socio-economic portions of the tests. Some excerpts from an editorial in that period will be useful in establishing the tone used:

> The state-wide achievement tests given every fourth and seventh grade public school pupil recently by the State Department of Education under a $250,000 grant from the Legislature leave a bad taste in our mouth.
>
> The announced purpose of the tests was to conduct an "assessment of basic skills."...
>
> An examination of some of the material reveals a disturbing slant. Here is a portion of one part of the reading comprehension tests given seventh graders: "Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me. They possess and enjoy (wealth) early, and it does something to them--it makes them soft where we are hard, and cynical where we are trustful."...
>
> Fourth and seventh graders were asked to fill out a 26-question section on "general information" which has questionable political and social implications...

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[36] Editorial, The Record Eagle, Traverse City, Michigan, January 17, 1970.

> We see the tests as something more than an educational "assessment of basic skills." We see in the tests elements of questionable nature that have little to do with achievement.[37]

In the current year, very few editorials were written about the assessment program. Those located were critical, but were critical largely on the grounds that the program did not seem to be producing much new information.

The impression one receives from examining the news media's handling of the development and administration of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program can be summarized as follows:

1. Stories appearing during the first year were generally favorable to the program and reflected the information coming from the State Department of Education.

2. Few news stories recognized that assessment testing was designed to be a part of a larger "accountability" model for the state.

3. Almost no public information linking the assessment testing to financial funding under Section 3 of the State Aid Bill could be located. That important link apparently was missed by the news media.

4. After the first year's testing was completed, the news media reported the results of the tests for their districts, reported the objections that had been raised to certain portions of the tests, and reported some of the technical objections that had been raised.

5. Following the first year's "flurry" of articles and editorials, there was a distinct dropping off in news coverage. The majority of stories simply reported on news releases from the State Department of Education, or reported on the test scores achieved by students in their districts.

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[37] Editorial, Marquette Mining Journal, Marquette, Michigan, January 30, 1970.

Reactions from Quasi-Governmental Organizations

In every state, there are always groups of citizens who represent special interests and who take "positions" relative to questions of public policy. Such organizations might include the League of Women Voters, the Chamber of Commerce, the Parent-Teacher Organizations, or the units of organized labor. In Michigan, The Michigan Chamber of Commerce has been extremely active in the field of educational accountability. Their activity stems from long-range goals of examining different areas of state government with a view toward making them more efficient and less costly.

Two specific sets of activity can be reported from the Michigan Chamber of Commerce activities relative to assessment testing. First, a number of local Chambers of Commerce objected to the reading tests that were included in the first year's testing program. The Ypsilanti Area Chamber of Commerce is representative of other such local or area groups. The Chamber sent the following letter to various officials within the state protesting the assessment program as it was then constituted:

> This letter registers the Ypsilanti Area Chamber of Commerce's formal protest to portions of the Michigan Department of Educations "Michigan Assessment of Basic Skills" test recently conducted in Michigan's public school system.
>
> Specifically, we question the "assessment value" of questions 1 thru 26 contained in Form SMT, grade 4 and 7. It is difficult, if not impossible, to correlate answers to such questions as "Does your family have a dishwashing machine or does your family have a vacuum cleaner," to an assessment of basic skills among school children in the fourth and seventh grade. It is more reasonable to conclude this is a "socioeconomic study" in which case we believe it is more appropriate, if at all, to so label this section.

> We are compelled to most strenuously object to and label as "anti-American propaganda" Form SMT, Reading Section 3, page 15 (column 2). The specific text attacks the very economic foundation of our state and nation. It degrades and defies the "free enterprise system." We are appalled that accusations and implications of this nature are contained in a state sponsored document.
>
> We feel the citizens of Ypsilanti and the State of Michigan are entitled to a full public explanation of how this language and philosophy were included in a state sponsored evaluation. Further, we join other concerned citizens and organizations in urging your office to insure that similar circumstances are not allowed to re-occur. We are confident you share our concern and will give this matter your prompt attention.[38]

This letter was addressed to the Governor of the State of Michigan. However, it was also sent to news media and to other state officials. It received wide attention and formed the basis for a number of editorial comments in various newspapers.

On the other hand, the efforts of the State Chamber of Commerce to investigate the entire area of public education in Michigan received much less press attention, although special reports from the Michigan State Chamber of Commerce were circulated widely to members and various state officials. The State Chamber of Commerce supported the assessment testing program, but supported it within a climate of a full accountability program for the state. The Chamber developed a number of proposals to increase class size, remove teacher tenure, increase the use of para-

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[38]Letter to The Honorable William G. Milliken, Governor, State of Michigan, from the Ypsilanti, Michigan, Chamber of Commerce, January 30, 1970.

professionals, and increase the required time of K-12 teachers in the classrooms.[39] These proposals, although obviously controversial, were advanced as ways of increasing educational efficiency and reducing the expenditure of tax dollars. Examination of newspaper accounts would suggest that these circulars received relatively little "play" in comparison to the single letter from the Ypsilanti Chamber. One major difference, of course, is that the Ypsilanti letter appeared at the height of the testing furor in 1970 while the State Chamber's more complete report appeared in the summer of 1972.

With any social problem, there are quasi-governmental organizations that interest themselves in the problem, investigate, and make public reports about the problem. Any dissemination plan must take account of the efforts of these groups since they can obviously play an important role in the acceptance of solutions advanced by an official agency. Further notice of the role of quasi-governmental organizations in the development of a dissemination model for state accountability models will be made in a later paper.

Reactions from Parents and Taxpayers

To date, there have been no systematic studies made relative to the attitudes of parents and taxpayers to the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. There have been districts that tabulated the parental reactions they received at the Board level or at the individual school

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[39]Michigan State Chamber of Commerce, Education/Taxes Special Report (a series of three circulars issued by the Chamber, Lansing, Michigan, April, May, and June, 1972).

level, but these obviously do not represent the citizenry of the state taken as a whole. Very few letters were received at the state level about the Michigan Educational Assessment Program which could be clearly identified as coming from a parent or a taxpayer who had no other affiliation.

Excerpts from some of the letters will help determine the tone of individual citizens:

1. We have just received the State-wide Test of Pupil Personal Services (sic) that my children will be asked to answer in schools my taxes help support. We strongly resent our privacy being invaded with the questions asked. We have instructed our children not to answer. If you wish answers, please contact us, the taxpayer.

2. I object to my son being asked questions in a fourth grade class such as: who acts as your father? who acts as your mother? family vacation last year? etc. I personally can see no reason for state board needing such information. If they do, census data or an inquiry to the parents themselves would be much more appropriate.

3. We attended a school board meeting in our...school district at which our Michigan 4th and 7th grade tests were made public. We were told only that our school district scores were slightly below 50 percentile-composite score.

   We were told that no school district can make any improvement on their scores in following years, because these scores only reflect the ability of the children, and changing in teaching methods cannot improve the children's ability.

   ...Can you advise us what yardsticks are available to evaluate our schools' performance? Are there correlations between taxes, average income, property evaluation, average expenditure per pupil, teacher-pupil ratio, ethnic mix in the schools,

progressive education vs. traditional methods and state tests?[40]

No letters could be found which objected to state assessment per se, but only objections to the specific tests which were used in the first two years of the program. State Officials report that the volume of letters has dropped considerably in the last year and that it is relatively rare for a letter to arrive from an individual who is clearly a parent or taxpayer and not representing some other group.

In the absence of specific studies looking at attitudes toward assessment and accountability, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the general state of the citizenry with respect to this issue. However, if the volume and nature of the letters received by state officials is any indicator, the whole question of educational accountability is one which interests only a small percentage of the population. This state of affairs, however, is not confined to accountability. Most public issues do not attract the attention of large proportions of the citizenry. Nevertheless, there was a body of individual citizens who became interested in assessment testing and took the trouble to write letters about their concerns. As is evident from even the few letters reported herein, there is much misinformation regarding the program. Any dissemination model has to make provisions for going beyond the technical audiences to accommodate the citizenry who may, ultimately, be responsible for the success or failure of educational accountability.

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[40] Letters received from citizens and filed in the Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Services Area, Michigan Department of Education. Identifying information of letters withheld.

Public Reaction: Summary

This section began by suggesting that the "general public" is not a large, unseparable mass of individuals, but rather consists of various separate and distinct groups of individuals possessing various backgrounds, needs, and concerns. Ample evidence was provided of the way in which various publics reacted to the Michigan Assessment Program--particularly in the first two years of that program.

It is of interest to consider what has happened to public reaction in recent months. Consultations with various public officials (see APPENDIX B) suggest that the picture has changed since 1970. The volume of letters has dropped considerably from all of the various publics this report has considered. In part, this can perhaps be laid to the removal of the attitude and socioeconomic items from the latest rounds of testing. In part, it may be laid to increased acceptance of the assessment concept. In part, it can perhaps be laid to the placement of the assessment program within a broader accountability model. It is this latter possibility which deserves final consideration in this report, since it is considered to be important in the eventual development of a dissemination model.

The Michigan Accountability Model

For the past two and one-half years, the State Department of Education has been developing an accountability model for Michigan. The model, as reported before, can be condensed into six general categories:

1. Identification, discussion and dissemination of common goals for Michigan Education.

2. Approaches to educational challenges based on performance objectives consistent with the goals.

3. Assessment of educational needs not being met and which must be met to achieve performance objectives and goals.

4. Analysis of the existing (or planned) educational delivery systems in light of what assessment tells us.

5. Evaluation and testing within the new or existing delivery system to make sure it serves the assessed needs.

6. Recommendations for improvement based upon the above.[41]

There is still reported criticism of the Michigan Model, and many groups do not yet understand the complete accountability model. Members of the Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Service in the Michigan State Department of Education have been making appearances at meetings of educators in various areas around the state; however, there are still questions and some hostility. There is no indication that the public yet understands that while assessment is a part of the Michigan Accountability Model, it is only a part and should not be equated with accountability.

While newspaper articles continue to report assessment rankings, there have been few stories which deal with the total accountability model. Those few stories which have concerned themselves with accountability have done so primarily in editorial fashion, calling for accountability but not explaining it.

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[41]Michigan Department of Education, A Position Statement On Educational Accountability (Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Department of Education, no date), p. 2.

There is no evidence to suggest that the general public does not still equate assessment with accountability. There may be more acceptance of assessment on the part of the general public, but this does not translate into an acceptance of accountability on the part of that general public.

The accountability model being developed by Michigan requires far more participation from teachers, administrators, boards of education as well as state level staff than did the assessment program. The model still includes assessment and still requires dissemination of results to the public. Hopefully, adoption of an appropriate dissemination model concurrent with adoption of the accountability model will mean that some of the problems encountered in disseminating results about state assessment testing will be avoided.

CONCLUSION

The major concern of Part I of this report was to identify some of the problems which arise when educational accountability models are introduced into a state and to begin placing those problems within a communication context. It was suggested that there are problems created by the definition of the term "accountability," the term "assessment," the term "testing," and the equation frequently made between them. While large segments of the public can frequently agree on the desirability of "accountability," that agreement disappears when the specific operational definition of accountability is finally introduced. The experience of Michigan in its Michigan Educational Assessment Program was used as an extended example.

Although Michigan was used as the primary example in Part I of the report, other states report similar problems to those of Michigan. New Jersey faces a court suit over its assessment program. Florida indicates poor reporting on the part of the media, complaints of poorly defined objectives, and concerns about the testing program. Many of the problems which arose in Michigan, and other states were communication problems. An inability on the part of state and local officials to be able to engage in "pre-planning" communication with various publics certainly emerged as one of the major problems. The failure to communicate exactly what was going to be done and why it was being done is another area in which communication broke down. The failure of the news media to make adequate reports on the assessment program is a final area that can be pointed to as a failure of communication.

In the two papers following this first attempt to set the stage, (1) some of the problems which arose in terms of current communication theory will be discussed and (2) a formal dissemination model to apply to the introduction of educational accountability models will be developed.

APPENDIX A

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA RELATIVE TO THE MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS

Educational Testing Service. Test Analysis: Michigan Assessment of Basic Skills, Grade 4, Form UMT. Princeton, N. J.: Educational Testing Service, April, 1972.

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APPENDIX B

INDIVIDUALS CONSULTED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Ascher, Dr. Gordon
Director of Assessment
New Jersey State Department of Education

Austin, Mr. John
Michigan Association of School Psychologists

Caesar, Mr. Gene
Administrative Assistant
State Senator Gilbert E. Bursley

Canja, Mr. Alex
Assistant to the Superintendent
Michigan Department of Education

Coburn, Mr. Terrance
Michigan Council of Teachers of Mathematics

Coopersmith, Mr. Frank
Michigan School Public Relations Association

Donovan, Dr. David
Director
Research, Evaluation and Assessment Services
Michigan Department of Education

Erion, Dr. John
Consultant in Accountability
Colorado State Department of Education

Fisher, Dr. Thomas
Research Consultant
Michigan Educational Assessment Program
Michigan Department of Education

Huyser, Mr. Robert
Supervisor
Michigan Educational Assessment Program
Michigan Department of Education

Impara, Dr. James
Director of Assessment
Florida State Department of Education

Jager, Mr. Phil
Budget Analyst
Bureau of the Budget
Executive Office of the Governor
State of Michigan

Kearney, Dr. C. Philip
Associate Superintendent for Research and
School Administration
Michigan Department of Education

Linne, Mr. Henry
President
Michigan Federation of Teachers

Lorimer, Mr. John
Psychologist
Lamphere, Michigan, Public Schools

Phelps, Mr. James
Bureau of Planning
Executive Office of the Governor
State of Michigan

Rudman, Dr. Herbert
Michigan Association of Professors of
Educational Administration

Swart, Mrs. Carolyn
Michigan League of Women Voters

Womer, Dr. Frank
National Council on Measurement in Education